

Abstract 465

TITLE: Factors Related to HIV Risk in Sex Industry Workers

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OBJECTIVES: To assess HIV-related knowledge, attitudes, and risk behaviors in a sample of sex industry workers. Sex industry workers are at increased risk of HIV infection from such sources as multiple sex partners, high-risk sex partners, and needle sharing. Previous research suggests that sex industry workers may be less likely to use barriers during sex with main partners, which may also contribute to the high level of risk for this population.

METHOD: An extensive face-to-face interview assessing knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to HIV was conducted with a convenience sample of 460 sex industry workers recruited from various counties in California by community-based health organizations.

RESULTS: Respondents reported large numbers of sex partners in the past 6 months (mean = 99.6, SD = 148.9, median = 60), and 61.7% of the respondents reported one or more "high-risk" partners, including male partners who had sex with males, injection drug using partners, or HIV+ partners. A total of 30.4% reported not using a barrier the last time they had vaginal or anal sex with a risky partner, and over half of these incidents occurred with the respondents' main partner. Additionally, 52.2% of these respondents reported a sexually transmitted disease diagnosed by a doctor or nurse in the previous 12 months. Drug use also posed a risk for HIV, with over a third of the respondents (34.8%) reporting injection drug use during the previous 30 days, and 22.2% reporting needle sharing. However, in spite of the very high prevalence of risky behaviors in this group, only about a third (34.6%) estimated their level of risk as "greater than" most people's. Fewer than 1/2% reported testing positive for HIV antibody, but 7.2% reported indeterminate results. This reported rate of indeterminate results is about 48 times higher than the actual rate of indeterminate results in the testing population, suggesting that these respondents may be motivated to not disclose their HIV status. The greater legal liabilities that ensue for sex industry workers who knowingly put their sex partners at risk is one possible explanation for this motivation.

DISCUSSION: These data clearly indicate that sex industry workers are at high risk for HIV as a result of both sexual and drug-using behaviors, including behaviors with main partners. Additionally, the majority of respondents are significantly underestimating their level of risk, and appear to be motivated to avoid disclosure of their HIV status in this interview, possibly because of the punitive legal measures that could result from such a disclosure. These findings may be useful for designing more effective interventions for this population.

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